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Rep. Henry Waxman to leave Congress after 40 years

By [Mark McDermott](#) January 30, 2014 | [News](#)

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Representative Henry Waxman addressing Hermosa Beach at the Community Center last January.

Rep. Henry Waxman, the powerful, long-tenured Congressman whose district last election was extended to include the South Bay, announced Thursday morning that he would retire from office at the completion of his current term this year.

Waxman, a Democrat, has served in Congress since 1974. He passed more legislation than any other sitting member of Congress, authoring and co-authoring many historically significant laws, including the Clean Air Act and the Affordable Care Act. He also led several high-profile investigations, perhaps most famously leading the Congressional hearings into tobacco companies in the 1980s that would eventually result in warning labels, advertising restrictions, and one of the most successful public health campaigns in modern history.

In a long, passionate [statement released on his website](#), Waxman cited a number of factors — including the fact that this Congress has been one of the least productive in the two century history of the legislative body. But mostly, at the age of 74, Waxman recognized he wanted a life outside of elected office after four decades of public service.

“The reason for my decision is simple. After 40 years in Congress, it’s time for someone else to have

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the chance to make his or her mark, ideally someone who is young enough to make the long-term commitment that's required for real legislative success," Waxman wrote. "I still feel youthful and energetic, but I recognize if I want to experience a life outside of Congress, I need to start soon. Public office is not the only way to serve, and I want to explore other avenues while I still can.

"I have had a long career and an eventful one – and I wouldn't trade any of it. I woke each day looking forward to opportunities to make our country stronger, healthier, and fairer. And I will always be grateful for this honor and privilege."

Waxman has long served a district that includes most of LA's Westside, including Beverly Hills, Santa Monica, and Malibu. Redistricting two years ago reshaped District 33 to include most of the South Bay, including the Beach Cities and Palos Verdes. Waxman faced [his first real opposition in decades](#) in 2012 when Bill Bloomfield, an independent candidate and self-funded candidate from Manhattan Beach, ran an aggressive and well-financed campaign to unseat the Congressman. Waxman prevailed with 54 percent of the vote.

In that campaign, he stressed the importance of seniority in achieving legislative success. At one forum in Redondo Beach, he cited his efforts to reform the tobacco industry as an example.

"It took almost 20 years to get legislation passed," Waxman said. "I know that in an interview Mr. Bloomfield said he'd go to Washington and in two years straighten things out and come back to beautiful Manhattan Beach. Things take time. It takes a lot of work. Saying you want to fix things doesn't make it happen. You have to work hard, and be willing to work with other people."

"I have been a Congressman for 37 years," Waxman said. "My way of behaving as a public official is to try to make life better for people. I fight for what I believe in. I don't pretend to be anything I am not, and I have always reached across the aisle to bring Republicans with me to pass important bills."

His doggedness was legendary. The *Nation* magazine described him as "Congress's Elliot Ness" for the way he utilized his office's investigative powers. He has investigated a wide range of matters, including the tobacco industry, Enron, Halliburton, the flu vaccine, steroid use in baseball, and George W. Bush's administration's Weapons of Mass Destruction claims that lead to the invasion of Iraq. He currently serves as the senior Democrat on the influential House Commerce and Energy Committee.

His Democratic colleague from Burbank, Rep. Adam Schiff, said that Waxman is irreplaceable.

"Henry Waxman will go down as one of the giants of Congress – smart, strategically savvy, dogged at oversight and a power to be reckoned with – his hand can be seen in almost every domestic achievement of the last few decades," Schiff said in a statement. "Along with the departure of Howard Berman last year, California and indeed the whole Congress, have lost two of the strongest pillars of policy-making in the domestic and foreign policy realms. I wish Henry every success in the future and while I am glad that he will be free to pursue his other ambitions, he will leave behind an unfillable void in the House."

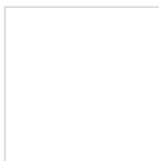
Waxman is an unassuming man, mustachioed, short of stature and soft-spoken. He is the son of a grocer from Watts who grew up in a household in which Franklin Delano Roosevelt was revered for championing the underdog and steering the United States through the Great Depression. He believed deeply in government, and proved himself extremely adept at digging deep into its grit and gears.

"My father was a grocer," Waxman said in 2012 interview with *Easy Reader*. "We lived above the store. His family was hard-hit during the Great Depression. He taught me that if FDR and the Democrats had not fought for the people, they would have been ignored. And I've always believed that government can play an important role in helping people. That is what I have tried to do in all my years of public service."

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